

# Diversity: Is there enough evidence to convict Quakers?

By Lynne Philipps



“DIVERSE” IMPLIES BOTH DISTINCTNESS AND MARKED CONTRAST, according to my dictionary. This brings to mind the old quip, “If you were accused of being a Quaker, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” What constitutes

evidence: What we do

on Sunday mornings? Whether we show up at human rights demonstrations? Our clothes, books, cars, and houses? Where we go on holidays? What degrees we have or do not have? How we earn money? How we spend leisure time and surplus money?

How DO we distinguish ourselves as Quakers? I was boarding a plane recently behind a man with a shaved head, brown skin, and wrapped in a maroon garment that resembled a sari. I deduced that he was probably a Tibetan monk. I doubt that anyone gave me a second glance, wondering if I were a Quaker. Like most Quakers, I could board any plane without exciting the suspicions of airport security personnel.

Quakers were once distinguished by their dress, a fact we are reminded of when we shop for cereal and see the silly trademark on oatmeal boxes. So, if not in dress, are there any ways in which Quakers appear to be distinct in Canadian society? Do we behave in marked contrast to other Canadians? I know that Quakers and Canadians dislike preaching. So I will be up front. If I were on reality TV, the world would know that I have an income, drive a car, wear conventional clothes, take holidays, fly occasionally in airplanes, live in a house which is bigger than I need – in short, live with a footprint which is as heavy as

the atheists’ next door. I am not preaching. I am soul searching and I invite you to join me.

OK, so we have the testimonies and the queries to guide us in making choices. SIMPLICITY: anyone with a Dell computer, a Subaru, a house with more bedrooms than people, who flies in airplanes (even though I am flying to Quaker meetings!) cannot pass that test. PEACE: is it enough to make speeches at peace rallies, to walk in demonstrations, to write letters to the newspapers and government, to give money to CFSC and other peace organizations, to approve minutes at Quaker meetings calling for non-violent resolution to conflicts? TRUTH: I am on firmer ground. I only lie in stories but I get to call it “fiction”. Alright, so I told my friend she looked fine when she anxiously wondered if her newly coloured hair was too obvious (it was).

And so on. Do we seek to change the world by revolution or evolution? Is it enough to say “welcome” when a person of colour ventures into our meeting house for the first time, or should we be locating our meetings in their neighbourhoods? Should Canadian Quakers affirm simplicity by not flying – not to Quaker events, not for holidays, not even to visit our beloved? Should we be prepared to shorten our work week in order to have more time and energy to volunteer for service in our meetings? Should we refuse transfers and promotions, and forgo the prestige and money in order to stay near our meeting?

Friends, I meant to write something quite different when I sat down at my keyboard. Something more intellectual, more abstract, more theological. To my surprise and chagrin, what came pouring out of my fingertips were the real questions that circle in my head like an uneasy dog trying to settle in a comfy nest when fleas are the real problem. Are they your questions, too? I am a Quaker. Is there enough evidence to prove that I am an example of diversity, both in our society and in the Religious Society of Friends? How about you? ↻

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